

# **A Study of Executive Level Staffing**

## **EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP**

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## ABSTRACT

Due to increasing concerns that the fire department was consistently running over budget, the Providence City Council called for an independent study of the fire department in 1995. The study was conducted the following year by the MMA Consulting Group, Inc., a company that specializes in analyzing the needs of local governments inclusive of public safety concerns. The MMA study, was a thorough examination of the operations and structure of the Providence Fire Department. They found that the organizational structure of the Fire Department in conflict with established management principles.

The report was critical because it indicated that the department exceeded basic span of control principles relative to executive level staffing,. The findings confirmed a need to augment the executive staff.

What is the correct composition for a headquarters staff? The purpose of this applied research paper was to examine fire departments procedures that determined a need for additional executive level staffing. Descriptive and historical research methodology was utilized for the study. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. Is there a universal process to determine the number of executive level staff needed to manage a fire department?
2. What are the common factors among fire departments with regard to the number of executive level staffers to the number of firefighters?
3. Are there common factors among fire departments regarding the number of executive level staffers relative to the population served?
4. Of the departments surveyed, what percent believe they have adequate executive level staffing?

Personal interviews, phone conversations and a survey were conducted to assist the research. The findings indicated there was no universal process for determining the number of executive level staffing and that 75% of departments surveyed believed they had adequate executive level staffing. The study found that of the departments responding to the survey an average of 2.4% of personnel were assigned to executive staffing. The Providence Fire Department had 2.04% of personnel assigned to executive staffing. The survey revealed that fire departments serving smaller populations had a higher percentage of executive level staffing. As the size of populations increased the percentage was smaller for executive level staffing.

The recommendations presented guidelines that would promote a department driven by a desire for excellence. Departments should create multiple opportunities for all staff to participate in professional development programs to facilitate research and planning.

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## INTRODUCTION

Due to increasing concerns that the fire department was consistently running over budget, the Providence City Council called for an independent study of the fire department in 1995. The study was conducted the following year by the MMA Consulting Group, Inc., a company that specializes in analyzing the needs of local governments inclusive of public safety concerns. The findings of the study were presented to the chief of department in the winter of 1997. They found the organizational structure in the Providence Fire Department was in conflict with established management principles.

The MMA study, conducted in the fall of 1996, was a thorough examination of the operations and structure of the Providence Fire Department. In reference to the executive level staffing, the report was critical because the department exceeded basic span of control principles. The study found that the training and safety divisions should report to the Assistant Chief's office, not directly to the Chief. The study also found that the roles of the Administrative Assistant and the Assistant Chief are not well defined or understood possibly causing overlap or loss of information (Morse, 1996).

Prior to the MMA study, executive level staffing for the Providence Fire Department consisted of:

- One Chief of Department
- One Assistant Chief
- One Administrative Assistant to the Chief of Department
- One Fire Marshal
- One Emergency Medical Service Director
- One Safety Officer
- One Director of Training
- One Superintendent of Automotive Repair Division
- One Superintendent of Building Repairs

The findings confirmed a need to augment the executive staff. One recommendation approved and implemented by the City Council in September 1998 did increase the executive level staff with an Assistant Chief of Operations position. Also, in September of 1998 a Department Investigative Officer was added to the executive staff.

What is the correct composition for a headquarters staff? The purpose of this applied research paper is to examine fire departments procedures that determine a need for additional executive level staffing. Descriptive and historical research methodology was utilized for the study. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. Is there a universal process to determine the number of executive level staff needed to manage a fire department?
2. What are the common factors among fire departments with regard to the number of executive level staffers to the number of firefighters?
3. Are there common factors among fire departments regarding the number of executive level staffers relative to the population served?
4. Of the departments surveyed, what percent believe they have adequate executive level staffing?

#### **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The city of Providence covers an area of 18.1 square miles. According to the 1990 census, the population of the city was 160,728; the daytime population grows to 320,000 plus (Providence Review Commission). The Providence Fire Department is the second oldest

continuous paid department in the country (Campbell & Connelly, 1985). The department has a written table of organization of 539 members (department increased it's table of organization by 60 firefighters in 1992 after a staffing study showed 4 firefighters rather than 3 firefighters on a truck would reduce injuries), however at this time the department is operating with 477 personnel.

The city is divided into three districts. The 1<sup>st</sup> district is under the command of a deputy assistant chief, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> districts are commanded by battalion chiefs. There are 14 engine companies, 8 ladder companies, 1 Special Hazard Unit (heavy-duty rescue), an air supply unit and 5 ALS rescue trucks. The department increased the number of ALS rescues from 3 to 5 trucks in 1988 (M. Dutra, personal communication, November 10, 1998).

Before 1970, the Providence Fire Department's executive staffing consisted of the Chief of Department and the senior battalion chief on duty. It wasn't until August of 1970 that the department created the position of Assistant Chief of Department. The four senior battalion chiefs were upgraded to deputy assistant chiefs and assigned to the four shifts.

During this period, the department reduced the number of fire districts from four to three, eliminating four battalion chiefs. In August 1973, the executive staff gained an administrative assistant to the chief of department, at the level of battalion chief (in the 1980's, this position was elevated to deputy assistant chief) and, in 1976, gained another battalion chief, Director of Emergency Medical Services (Campbell & Connelly, 1985). The department safety officer position, with the rank of battalion chief, came in 1991 in response to the NFPA Standard Number 1500 initiative. The above mentioned positions composed the headquarters staff that MMA studied and deemed insufficient to run the organization of the Providence Fire Department.

This study relates to the National Fire Academy's Executive Leadership Course, the fourth and final course of the Executive Fire Officer Program. Executive leadership skills enable the fire chief to lead with vision and direction. As a chief fire executive officer, it is essential to have the knowledge and ability to supervise and lead the organization. The study employs the key processes used by effective executive level managers.

The findings of this study could help establish recommendations for a more definitive NFPA standard that would support a minimum level of executive positions to manage a fire department. These findings could impact the Providence Fire Department by corroborating evidence that demonstrates the need for increased executive level staffing.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There appeared to be a scarcity of literature that specifically addressed executive level staffing in fire departments. However, there was ample literature on managing fire departments that gave an overall picture of how fire departments should operate at all levels. The literature review also covered executive leadership to verify the importance of the leadership role in managing a fire department.

### **Executive Level Staffing**

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), an organization that is a prime leader in fire service education, has standards and publications that address managing fire departments. Other sources of the literature review came from textbooks on fire service management, articles on private sector management and leadership, personal interviews, executive fire officer applied

research papers, and articles obtained through the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center.

NFPA Standard Number 1201, 1994 Edition, "Standard for Developing Fire Protection Services for the Public", stated in Chapter 5-1: "The fire department shall have an organizational structure that facilitates efficient and effective management of its resources to carry out its mandate...The fire department shall have programs, procedures and organizations for preventing the outbreak of fires in the community and to minimize the danger to persons and damage to property caused by fires that do occur. The fire department also shall carry out other compatible emergency services as mandated" (p.5 & 6).

The appendix of NFPA 1201 A-6-2.3 identified formulas to determine the number of full-time personnel needed on fire companies. There is no such formula for determining the number of executive level positions required for headquarters staffing. NFPA 1201 A-5-6.3 suggests, "The number of supervisory chief officers needed depends on the size of the department" (p.27). NFPA 1201 A-6-2.5 attests further evidence that there is no formula for executive level positions: "For assistance, the fire chief should have administrative and other qualified technical support in proportion to the size of the department's operations. This support should comprise qualified personnel in either the fire department or another municipal department" (p.28).

Chapter 4 of NFPA 1201, "Strategic (Master) Planning" states that the fire department shall maintain a continuing program of research and planning: "The research and planning shall encompass examination of any or all aspects of the fire department's activities, both generally and specifically. It shall be directed toward improving and maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness of the fire department and toward maintaining a responsive approach to the community's changing needs for service" (p.6). The inference could be made that every

division, including headquarters staff must maintain continuous research and planning, so as to stay efficient and effective.

NFPA Standard Number 1000, 1994 Edition, “Standard for Fire Service Professional Qualifications Accreditation and Certification Systems”, does not address executive level staffing per se, but assesses the personnel of the organization. However, Appendix B of NFPA 1000 (not part of the requirement of the standard) offered the following information on accreditation and the fire service: “A department that has been accredited has the assurance that the general characteristics of the institution (department) have been examined and found to be satisfactory” (p.9). Consequently, if a CEO were to seek this accreditation and certification for his/her department and receive it, then one could surmise that the staff was satisfactory.

Peterson (1991) said planning for the future needs of a fire department is the most important job of fire department managers, yet few fire departments are staffed or financed to support any significant research activity. Peterson further states that the fire service has many unique management needs because it is not profit-oriented and it has an obscure productivity pattern. Fire departments are a major consumer of tax dollars, use costly equipment, are heavily dependent upon personnel, and have no satisfactory means of measuring the effectiveness of its operation relative to cost. Effectiveness in the fire service is the most difficult element for management to measure. It is difficult to assess the number of fires and the amount of suffering fire department activities has prevented.

Roberts (1991) stated that the role of the fire service has expanded far beyond fire suppression. “Citizens are dependent on the fire department to ensure their protection against the dangers of fire, panic, explosion, other hazardous conditions and any emergency events that may occur in the community” ( p.9-37).

He described the basic principles of organization that he believes are associated with fire departments. First, work should be divided among the individuals and operating units according to a plan. The plan should be based on the individual functions that must be performed (fire prevention, training, communications, etc.). Second, as a department increases in size and complexity, the need for coordination also increases. Small departments are simple organizations that allow frequent personal contact among individuals; thus there is less need for extensive formal coordination. However, as departments increase in size and complexity, they require more extensive coordination of the operating units in order to achieve their objectives.

Roberts identified the following staff functions as: fire prevention, training, maintenance, communications, research and planning, community relations, financial management, personnel management and fire protection engineering. He suggested that an officer not assigned to line functions supervise these staff functions when it is a large department. However, when dealing with smaller departments, officers from the line may supervise these functions and, a single officer may supervise more than one staff function.

Roberts stressed the importance of these functions to the operation of a fire department. The absence of any of these functions may result in important tasks not getting done. Therefore, the efforts of personnel within the department may not be utilized in the most effective manner. Roberts, like Peterson, believes there must be an organizational plan. Organizational plans are designed to show the relationship of each operating division to the total organization.

Carter and Rausch (1989) purport that a fire department, like any other organization, must have some form of external and internal structure to achieve the purposes of the organization. Carter and Rausch believe internal structure is based on four organizational principles: 1) division of work, 2) coordination, 3) clearly established lines of authority, and 4)

unity of command. The external structure of the organization is the relationship among the operating divisions of the total organization. Because the work of modern fire departments has far exceeded the traditional fire-related objectives, it is essential that the organizational components of today's fire department work together toward shared goals for an effective and efficient fire department.

Carter and Rausch addressed administrative management and emphasized that at least one deputy chief is needed in all fire departments. This person is responsible in the absence of the chief officer and assists in overall operational command at fires. For smaller fire departments, they suggest that dual roles are played by company officers as duty-shift commanders. They recommend that officers such as deputy chiefs and battalion chiefs in staff positions have roles that provide direction and sound recommendations to the chief of department in order for a fire department to achieve its highest possible level of performance.

Forsman (1988) noted that because fire departments have to compete with other governmental agencies for funds, the acquisition of resources, whether it is personnel, fire apparatus, or fire stations, the acquisition of the resources is often tied to productivity. He remarked that productivity is generally defined as the efficiency with which inputs (resources) are transformed into outputs (desired programs and services). Although as Peterson (1991) indicated, demonstrating productivity in the fire service is a unique problem.

Forsman identified three approaches to productivity improvement that have been successfully followed in public and private sectors: 1) capital and technological investment; 2) strengthened management and work redesign; and, 3) work force improvement. Management intervention is essential changes that take many forms. One form that he addressed was the use of internal and external management consultants to assist with work redesign and other

productivity improvement efforts. Some departments require outside (external) assistance but many use internal managerial resources. These managerial resources need to be regularly tuned to productivity improvements, service enhancement, and cost reduction. Forsman believed however, that outside management consultants bring new perspectives and ideas.

Another area of great concern for the fire chief is the fire department budget. "It is easy to manage when there is a surplus of money. When money is in short supply, management becomes more challenging" (Ayres, 1988, p.213). The role of the fire service has expanded far beyond the traditional fire fighting duties yet public financial stresses have sometimes resulted in budget reductions. The process of budget development consumes staff time and effort throughout the fiscal year, but the process is necessary if the department is to provide effective and professional services. The fire chief must ensure he/she has the staff to assist him in managing the department's needs.

Matzer and Whisenand (1988) addressed human resource planning in two parts: 1) staffing the organization; and, 2) providing career development guidance to incumbent personnel. They emphasized human resources needs vary considerably among local governments: "Even in cities and counties of similar sizes and populations, the number of employees required to deliver appropriate fire services will differ" (p.261). Reasons for such variations include: type of land area, density, degree of industrialization, amount of property to be protected, number and types of fire risks, level of risk elected officials are willing to live with, and citizen expectations of the fire service.

Snook (1988) discussed span of control: "Supervisors need to be assigned a group that is a manageable size. Normally, under non-emergency conditions most supervisors are expected to be able to supervise seven to twelve persons" (p.57).

Lopes (1995) explained that there is so much new technology and information that many fire departments have found it necessary to establish a dedicated position to handle the management of information and technology. This position provides technical support and training to fire department personnel. Lopes suggested that because of computers the chief could utilize his staff more effectively; however, there must be a plan. He claimed that without a plan, the department would simply speed up duplication of effort or produce useless paper.

Lopes commented: "A basic premise in staffing is to make assignments that enable the department to accomplish its mission and reach its goals. The personnel strategy should support the organizational strategy" (p.22). Staffing may be determined by analyzing the complexity, standardization, and decision-making requirements in an organization.

Analyzing complexity, includes span of control, the number of tasks required, and the geographic layout of the department. Lopes observed that complexity issues are generally related to size, the larger the department, the more they specialize in assignments. He further observed that bureaucracies may favor specialization, but complexity generally worked against excellence. "Increased size and specialization slow an organization's ability to react to environmental changes. Single-purpose positions make it difficult for individuals to grasp the 'big picture'" (p.22). Lopes recommended single purpose support staff to a minimum and large organization should have proportionally fewer support positions based on economies of scale.

Peter Senge (1995) asserted, "complex organizations have complex forces that maintain the status quo and inhibit the spread of new ideas" (p. 49). It is these types of warnings from Lopes and Senge that call attention to job stagnation.

Lopes (1995) suggested that the amount of required standardization is a second factor in determining organizational structure. If there is much standardization such as goals, rules

policies, procedures, etc., then the department can be more structured. He recommended departments have a conceptual framework that include mission statement, goals and objectives, policy manual, job specifications, and a training manual. Standardization should open opportunities by creating a framework for initiative and participation.

Lopes examined decision-making as a final factor for determining office staffing. Decision-making should be made at the lowest level at which individuals possess the knowledge, abilities, and resources to complete the assignment. He believes that employees should be empowered to contribute and make a difference.

### **Executive Leadership**

Goldbach (1995) commented on the leadership role of the chief executive of the fire department. He suggests that the chief of department must, realize that without the full cooperation of the personnel, the department will never reach its full potential. The chief must know that he has an impact on the departmental management environment, he also described some important characteristics an effective leader should possess:

- a commitment to excellence
- being a visionary
- goal setting
- innovative
- courageous,
- possessing integrity and honesty

Goldbach identified five basic components of successful management: 1) planning, 2) organizing, 3) directing, 4) coordinating, and 5) controlling. Effective planning cannot be done

in a vacuum nor can it be rigid; alternatives should be available to allow flexibility. Goldbach suggested that the best way to begin planning is to start with a goal statement.

It is the chief's responsibility to organize participants according to plan design. In this management function, participants must know to whom to report and who reports to them (unity of command). Span of control is an element of organizing because it establishes the number of subordinates that a supervisor can effectively manage.

Goldbach list four factors that determine span of control:

- The ability of the supervisor
- The ability and degree of cooperativeness of the subordinate
- The nature of the task to be accomplished
- Geography or the dispersal of those beings supervised

Specialization of labor, delegation of responsibilities and authority are other elements of organizing. Units, bureaus, or divisions divide work in most fire departments and as a result, teamwork between all divisions as well as line and staff personnel is essential to the department's mission statement.

Directing involves logical assignments, communications within the department, motivation of employees, and team building. Effective coordination eliminates overlapping of tasks and duplication of effort. He remarked that, "Optimal coordination occurs when all individuals see how their position contributes to the goals of the unit, division, bureau, or department" (p.237). Control is the process established by the leaders or managers to ensure that a task is carried out, completed, or both. Goldbach contended that an effective manager and leader in today's fire service must be knowledgeable and experienced in these five management functions which are essential in the fire service.

Halas (1993) examined the management perspective of organizational development as a means to improve organizational effectiveness. There are many reasons that indicate a need for fundamental change such as: continuous re-occurrence of the same types of problems; failure to increase productivity despite using a variety of methods; and, low morale among employees with no clear reason why.

If the chief executive officer believes that a fundamental change is required in the department, then his role and responsibility should be directed toward identifying the root causes of the problems. Leaders and managers should strive to involve all personnel within their organization to develop and effectively implement appropriate interventions. Halas believes this type of involvement as a crucial function of organizational development. He looked at the end result of this organizational change as enhancing the quality of service through better utilization of technical, as well as human resources.

Halas (1993) examined "total quality management" (TQM) as the foundation of performance management programs. He noted that unless fire departments have a vision, mission, and strategic goals, they would meet with failure. He believes chief executive officers of fire departments must employ some type of performance management technique within their department that include a vision, a mission, and a strategic plan.

Morgan (1996) proffered this advice for the department chiefs to manage change. Whenever there is to be major changes, the chief should:

1. Secure elected officials support prior to undertaking the decision to implement major changes.
2. Define the current organizational culture. Know who the informal leaders are within the organization. Solicit their support.

3. Complete a thorough evaluation and planning process that will explore how the organization will be affected.
4. Perform a detailed cost-benefit analysis for every proposed changed.  
Carefully weigh the intended benefit to be realized against the suspected opposition and resistance. Determine if benefits outweigh the cost prior to proceeding.
5. Create your vision of where the organization needs to be. Communicate that vision to every member within the organization. Have change agents drop seeds of this vision months before presenting your vision. This will make buy-in easier.
6. Involve member participation in the development of the strategic plan that will set coarse for the achievement of the vision. Solicit their input.  
Incorporate this into the revised mission statement.
7. Be aware of the timing of the change effort and the speed at which you proceed with the implementation plan.
8. Monitor, evaluate, and adjust the implementation. Handle problems swiftly and honestly. Address any employee concerns quickly. Communicate the effectiveness of the implementation to the employees to provide reassurance (p.25).

Tallon (1996) advised departments to be aware that their efforts will face strong resistance to change. In addition, ongoing efforts must be made to mitigate dysfunctional resistance whenever executive design change is under consideration. Tallon said that efforts should be trust-based and empathetic to the predictably strong feelings of the fire service leaders who have given their best years to their departments and their communities (p.22). Tallon

noted that departments must be attentive to the ongoing problem of developing leadership skills. He posited that the development of leadership skills must be a high priority investment in the fire service

Covey's (1996) model of principle-centered leadership discussed three roles of a leader. He posited that there are three basic leadership functions:

1. Pathfinding— tying together your value system and vision with the needs of customers and other stakeholders through a strategic plan. Covey called this the strategic pathway.
2. Aligning – consists of ensuring that your organizational structure, systems, and operational processes all contribute to achieving your mission and vision of meeting the needs of customers and other stakeholders.
3. Empowering – using employees talents, ingenuity, intelligence, and creativity while there is true alignment toward a common vision and a common mission creating a co-mission. Individual purpose and mission are commingled with the empowered employee.

Covey influenced this research by dispelling some of the traditional ways of management and embracing a culture or value system centered upon principles.

Hewitt (1996) maintained that leadership is doing the right things and management is doing the right things right. He said the two skills are complementary and the secret is to harmonize the efforts between them.

### **Summary**

The literature review identified NFPA standards, *The Fire Chief's Handbook*, and the *NFPA Fire Protection Handbook* as a good foundation of how fire department organizations should appear. *Management in the Fire Service* (Carter and Rausch) and *Managing Fire Services* (Granito and Coleman) gave a more in-depth view of how fire departments should be structured.

These sources, along with the writings of Hewitt, Halas, Morgan, and Tallon, influenced my research by providing insight into today's fire departments management design. Most importantly, all of these sources

emphasized the importance of having a strategic plan, a vision, a mission statement and a person at the helm who is an innovator, a leader and a person who empowers his people. Senge and Covey affirmed my analysis of the fore mentioned writers.

## PROCEDURES

The research began with the literature review at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center and through the use of the interlibrary loan system. The review focused on management practices for the fire service along with an examination of executive level staffing.

Personal interviews were conducted with Providence Fire Department Chief James F. Rattigan. The chief shared his thoughts on executive level staffing before the MMA study and post MMA study. Rattigan said, "Since the added positions of Assistant Chief of Field Operations and the position of Department Investigative Officer there is less crisis management and more time allowed to manage department business" (J. Rattigan, Personal Communication, December 2, 1998).

Battalion Chief J. Curtis Varone of Providence, winner of the Executive Fire Officer Outstanding Research Award for four consecutive years, commented that executive level staffing rests on the abilities of the people on the staff. However, when positions that should be in place are not, then it is up to the chief executive officer of the department to get that message out to the decision-makers, namely city administrators and the city council and lobby for the positions needed (J.C. Varone, personal communication, December 2, 1998).

Information was solicited via telephone conversations with John Granito of MMA Consulting Group and co-author of *Managing Fire Services*. Granito responded to questions related to the MMA study of the Providence Fire Department with attention to executive level staffing. I conducted a phone interview with Kevin Roche of the Phoenix Fire Department. Granito referred Roche as a result of a 1995 Phoenix study. Roche's work consisted of a survey on Fire Department Operations that entailed an analysis of personnel assigned to various divisions inclusive of administrative personnel.

I designed and administered a survey (see Appendix A) that addressed my research questions. The surveys were mailed to twenty fire departments in the northeast: ten New England fire departments, four New York departments, four New Jersey departments, and two Pennsylvania departments. Fifteen departments responded to the survey.

For the purpose of this paper, I defined executive level staffing as: battalion chiefs and above who are not line chiefs. They are also referred to as headquarters staff.

### **Limitations**

As this applied research project addressed executive level staffing in the fire service, research was restricted to The National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center. There was limited information directly related to executive level staffing.

The sample population was purposely limited to a specific geographic region of the country. The sample population is small and is not intended to characterize fire departments across the nation.

## **RESULTS**

### **1. Is there a universal process to determine the number of executive level staff needed to manage a fire department?**

The literature review and the survey revealed that there was not a universal process for determining the number of executive level staffing. However, the literature review did indicate the size and complexity of each department was an important factor in determining the executive staffing level.

Question #7 of the survey asked, "Is there a set process by which your department determines the number of executive level staff? Yes or No, if 'Yes' briefly explain".

86% answered "No"

13% answered "yes" (both stated they are established by city manager)

### **2. What are the common factors among fire departments in regard to the number of executive level staffers to the number of firefighters?**

Question #4 of the survey examined, “Number of line personnel and number of executive level staffing/ headquarters staff (Battalion Chiefs and higher). With fifteen departments responding the percentage was 2.4% of personnel assigned to executive staffing. The Providence Fire Department had 2.04% of personnel assigned to executive staffing. Of the departments that responded to the Phoenix survey, 3.73% of their personnel were assigned to “administrative duties”.

### **3. Are there any common factors among fire departments regarding the number of executive level staffers and the population served?**

The survey revealed that fire departments serving smaller populations had more percentage of executive level staffing. As the populations increased the percentage was smaller for executive level staffing. However, the Phoenix survey did not show any significant change in percentage.

	THIS RESEARCH	PHOENIX
Population		
0 – 99,999	3.55%	3.62%
100,000 –		
499,999	2.12%	3.83%
500,000-		
999,999	1.4%	3.10%
1,000,000	1.28%	3.92%
Average	2.4%	3.73%

The Phoenix survey had a response rate of 80%, 216 fire departments throughout the country responded to their survey. My survey was much smaller and limited to New England and a handful of departments in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The response rate for my research was 75%, 15 departments responded. One explanation could be the information supplied was incorrect. One of the smaller departments had a percentage rate of 9%, the closest percentage to this was 3.8%, a more realistic rate if you look at the Phoenix study. Another

reason could be the Phoenix survey included all personnel on staff, whereas my survey only included executive staff personnel.

#### **4. Of the fire departments surveyed, what percent believe they have adequate executive level staffing?**

Survey results indicate 73% believe they are adequate and 26% believe executive level was not adequate:

4 departments indicate they did not believe they had adequate executive staffing.

11 indicate they believe executive staffing was adequate.

### **DISCUSSION**

The literature review and the survey revealed that there was not a universal process for determining the number of executive level staffing. Although the literature was not specific with exact numbers, the literature did indicate the size and complexity of each department was an important factor in determining the staffing level.

The survey findings indicate that executive level staffing is not a universal problem. While there are some departments experiencing this dilemma, the reasons appear to be department specific. Of the 15 departments responding to the survey, four departments indicated that they felt the level of executive staffing was inadequate. Two of the four respondents indicated that their departments lost executive level positions due to budget.

The research disclosed little information to discern the need for additional executive level staffing. However, the literature did suggest a configuration for an effective and efficient fire department. Roberts (1991) identified staff functions and suggested that an officer not assigned to line functions when it is a large department supervises these staff functions. I did not find a definition of what constitutes a large department in the literature. NFPA standards and the NFPA Fire Protection Handbook refer to small, medium, and large departments, but there should be more than three categories when talking of size of departments.

The Phoenix Fire Department conducted a National Survey on Fire Department Operations in 1995. There was an 80% response rate (216 departments out of 269 departments responded to survey). Part of the survey reported on the percentage of personnel assigned to administrative duties relative to overall department personnel: 3.73% of department personnel were assigned to administrative duties (Roche, 1995).

The Phoenix study was a general survey of fire department operations. It included a section designed to elicit information concerning “percent of total personnel assigned to: response, administrative, dispatch, prevention/inspections, fire investigations, training, facility maintenance, apparatus maintenance and then further broken down to population served.” The Phoenix survey serves as a beginning for much needed documentation for fire service organizations. However, the sub-section “administrative” would have been more beneficial to this study had it determined how many of the administrative personnel were at the executive level. My study reported that 2.396% of personnel were assigned to executive staffing. The Phoenix survey reported that 3.73% of personnel were assigned to "administrative duties".

The results of my research demonstrate that there is no set process to determine the optimum number of executive level personnel to manage a fire department. All departments are subject to the discretion of a higher authority. Most public fire departments report to a town or city manager, or mayor; private fire departments report to a board of directors; and volunteer fire departments have their own unique set-up for accountability. Although, these higher authority figures are removed from the fire department, they often make the final decisions that impact on determining or setting the number of executive staff. These decisions sometimes prove detrimental to the fire organization.

As Forsman and Peterson indicated, fire departments are not profit-oriented and must compete with other governmental agencies for funding. The custom is for the chief executive officer of the fire department to lobby and influence decision-makers for whatever he/she believes is vital to the department. Much depends on the executive leadership skills of the chief executive officer. The literature recommends that leaders possess characteristics such as the following to manage an effective and efficient fire department:

- Being a visionary
- Possessing a mission statement
- Being results oriented
- Goal setting
- Innovative
- Courageous
- Possessing integrity and honesty
- Open to new ideas

- Able to introduce and manage change effectively
- Developing and empowering employees
- Commitment to excellence

The implications of this study build upon the findings of the MMA study of the Providence Fire Department. The MMA study found that Providence was deficient in practicing the basic tenets of management. The results of my study reinforce the need for the compliance with the basic components of successful management to have a positive impact on planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and controlling.

Since the MMA study, the Providence Fire Department has taken some measures to correct such things as the principle of span of control and unity of command by establishing the position of Assistant Chief of Operations. This executive staff position clearly delineates the lines of responsibility and the span of control more manageable from department chief down to other executive staff positions. I believe this is only the beginning of improving organizational effectiveness. If the Providence Fire Department continues its search of fire service excellence, then it will undoubtedly rank in the top 25 excellent fire departments in the country in the new millenium.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are suggested to help ensure adequate executive level staffing for the Providence Fire Department regardless of the direct or indirect impact upon executive level staffing.

- The Providence Fire Department should encourage all personnel to participate in professional development programs and to attend National Fire Academy courses. It is especially important for executive level staff to participate in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy.
- Establish a committee to design a department "Mission Statement" based on the pursuit of excellence.
- Establish a task force to address "research and planning" with particular attention to technology for department needs. The task force would meet periodically with its

primary goal directed toward improving and maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness of the department. This task force would be responsible for establishing a five-year strategic plan. Recommendations from this committee would be reported to chief of department for endorsement.

The above recommendations are made to ensure that all facets of the Providence Fire Department including the executive staff are managed to maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

A final thought on executive leadership skills and executive staffing: “The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good people to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.”

Theodore Roosevelt

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## **APPENDIX A**

The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine how fire departments determine when to create additional executive level staffing (not line chiefs).

1. Name of fire department \_\_\_\_\_
2. Your rank \_\_\_\_\_
3. Paid department \_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer department \_\_\_\_\_ Combination \_\_\_\_\_
4. Number of line personnel \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of executive level staffing / headquarters staff (BCs & up) \_\_\_\_\_
5. In your opinion, is the number of executive level staff adequate? Yes or No
6. Population served (check one):  

under 10,000 _____	10,000 – 25,000 _____	25,001 – 50,000 _____
50,001 – 75,000 _____	75,001 – 100,000 _____	100,001 – 150,000 _____
150,001 – 250,000 _____	250,001 – 500,000 _____	500,001 – 1,000,000 _____
Over 1,000,000 _____		
7. Is there a set process by which your department determines the number of executive level staff?  
Yes / No If "Yes" briefly describe  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
8. Does your department have a chief's position that is strictly in charge of field operations? \_\_\_\_\_
9. If yes, how long has your department had this position? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Was there any particular reason for your department to establish this position?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
11. What does the position of Operations Chief oversee? (check all that apply)
 

_____ suppression _____ fire prevention _____ fiscal _____ safety _____ personnel _____ warehouse supply	_____ training _____ facility maintenance _____ EMS _____ automotive maintenance _____ data management
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Please send additional information that you think would describe your department's headquarters staff.

Deputy Assistant Chief Jim Cotter  
 122 Old Post Rd.  
 Wakefield, R.I. 02879.

E-mail: [jcotter835@aol.com](mailto:jcotter835@aol.com) or

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## **APPENDIX B**

# PROVIDENCE FIRE DEPARTMENT

